In the narrow, sun-baked lanes of Peshawar in 1880, two Pathan boys grew up side by side — Rahman and Gulzar. The city, wrapped in the scent of dust, spices, and gunpowder, was a restless meeting point between empires, where traders, soldiers, and wanderers passed through the bustling Qissa Khwani Bazaar. Rahman, the elder by a year, had the sharp eyes of a born observer and the quiet pride of a Khan's son. Gulzar, on the other hand, was restless and daring — a boy who laughed at danger and dreamed of crossing the Khyber Pass to see the lands beyond. Together they herded goats by the river, wrestled in the courtyard, and whispered stories of warriors and jinn under the flickering glow of an oil lamp.

But the year was not an ordinary one. British officers rode through the city more frequently now, their strange accents echoing in the bazaars. Rumours of rebellion, alliances, and betrayal hung heavy in the air like the scent of gun oil. The boys didn't understand politics — not yet — but they felt the shift, the unease. Sometimes, when Rahman's father met with tribal elders late into the night, the boys would listen from the shadows. Gulzar's eyes would gleam with adventure, but Rahman's heart would tighten with fear. For even at twelve, he sensed that their childhood — like the peace in Peshawar — was slipping away, and something fierce and unforgettable was about to begin.

One sweltering afternoon, as Rahman and Gulzar loitered near their father's fruit stall in Qissa Khwani Bazaar, the air turned heavy with insult. Their father, Haji Karim Khan, a man known across Peshawar for his honesty and generosity, stood tall behind his cart of golden apricots and ripe pomegranates. A British Tommy — red-faced and arrogant — swaggered through the market, knocking over baskets and mocking the traders in broken Pashto. When he spat on the fruit and sneered, "Native filth," something ancient and unyielding rose within Karim Khan. Without a word, he struck the soldier hard across the face — a sound sharp enough to silence the entire bazaar.

The consequences came before sunset. Soldiers stormed through the alleys, dragging Karim Khan away as his sons watched helplessly. Rahman clung to his father's sleeve until a rifle butt struck his shoulder, sending him sprawling. Gulzar shouted until his voice cracked. By nightfall, the news spread: five years in prison for assaulting a British officer, and confiscation of every grain, every tree, every inch of land that bore the family name. The once-busy stall stood empty, its wooden boards splintered, its fruits crushed into the dust. That night, under a sky heavy with silence, Rahman swore never to forget the sound of that slap — not for its defiance, but for the price it demanded. It was the moment their childhood ended, and a new kind of fire was born in their hearts.

Within a week of their father's imprisonment, the family's world crumbled completely. The British authorities came with papers and rifles, forcing

Rahman, Gulzar, their mother, and two younger sisters out of the only home they had ever known. The mud-brick walls that had once echoed with laughter now stood hollow, marked for seizure. Their mother wept quietly as neighbours watched from behind half-open doors — afraid to show sympathy, afraid to speak. For a few days, the family found shelter with distant relatives in the outskirts of the city, but Rahman and Gulzar could not bear the pitying looks or whispered gossip that followed them wherever they went.

One evening, as the call to prayer faded into the mountains, the brothers sat outside beneath a tamarind tree and made their decision. “We are not beggars,” Rahman said, his voice steady despite the tremor beneath it. Gulzar nodded, his jaw set. They would go to Agra — a journey of hundreds of miles — where their late father’s brother was said to live near the shining white dome of the Taj Mahal. The stories they had heard of Agra’s markets, its busy streets and craftsmen, filled them with a fragile kind of hope. With a few coins hidden in Gulzar’s waistband and a bundle of dried bread from their mother, the two boys left before dawn. The road ahead was uncertain, but in their hearts burned the pride of Pathans — and the unspoken vow to reclaim their family’s honour, no matter how far from Peshawar they had to go.

The journey to Agra was long and unforgiving. Barefoot for most of the way, Rahman and Gulzar walked under a sun that showed no mercy by day and slept on cold earth by night. Sometimes they caught a ride with bullock carts heading east, squeezed between sacks of grain and weary travellers. Other times, they trudged for miles through dust storms and rain, guided only by the stars and the occasional kindness of strangers. Their bread turned hard as stone, their feet blistered, and their clothes grew ragged, yet neither boy complained. Each mile between them and Peshawar felt like a test — a measure of their endurance and pride.

Along the Grand Trunk Road, they passed caravans of traders, British convoys, and wandering fakirs who blessed them for courage. Gulzar, ever restless, would whistle or joke to keep their spirits alive, while Rahman walked in silence, his thoughts heavy with the memory of their father’s arrest. Sometimes, as they rested beneath the acacia trees, Rahman would unfold the small scrap of paper bearing their uncle’s name and address — the only proof of destination in their uncertain flight. By the time the white shimmer of the Taj Mahal finally appeared on the horizon, both boys were lean, sunburnt, and changed. What had begun as an escape had quietly become a pilgrimage — not to a monument, but to a future they would have to carve out with their own hands.

When Rahman and Gulzar finally reached Agra, weary and dust-covered, the city felt like another world — its wide streets alive with colour, the air fragrant with cardamom and roasted nuts, and the distant shimmer of the

Taj Mahal glowing like a dream. Their uncle, Haji Siraj, was stunned to see them standing at his doorstep, thin as reeds and darkened by the sun. For a moment, he said nothing — then pulled them both into his arms, his eyes glistening. Inside, their aunt wept openly, serving them warm milk and flatbread while murmuring prayers of gratitude. The boys ate silently, the taste of home mixing with the ache of all they had lost.

Over the following days, the family in Agra did everything to make them feel welcome. The cousins offered their beds, the uncle found them clean clothes, and the household treated them with warmth that softened their pride, though never fully melted it. Rahman, always the quieter one, spent evenings helping his uncle in the small fruit stall near the mosque, while Gulzar explored the streets, curious about every corner of the bustling city. Yet even amid the comfort, the brothers carried Peshawar within them — its hills, its honour, and the memory of their father behind bars. Agra was safety, but not home. Deep down, both boys knew their story had only just begun.

In Agra, life slowly took on a rhythm. Their uncle's kindness and the city's quiet hum gave the boys a chance to rebuild what had been shattered. Rahman, ever disciplined and thoughtful, divided his days between work and study. He helped his uncle at dawn, arranging crates of fruit and calling out to customers in the market, and then spent long afternoons at a small missionary school that offered lessons in English and arithmetic. His diligence soon drew attention — teachers admired his manners and quick understanding. Over the years, Rahman's determination carried him through hardship, until at last, he proudly completed his Bachelor of Arts. For his mother, who received the news in a trembling letter back in Peshawar, it was as though a small piece of dignity had been restored.

Gulzar, meanwhile, took a different path. School never held him for long; his hands were made for work, not for books. He found a job in a shoe shop near the Jama Masjid, polishing leather, stitching soles, and bargaining with customers in half a dozen accents. His laughter filled the narrow street, and soon everyone in the bazaar knew him by name. Though the pay was modest, Gulzar's pride in earning it was boundless. He would often say, half in jest and half in truth, "Rahman will wear fine coats one day — and I'll make sure his shoes are the best in Agra." Between them, there was no envy — only the quiet bond of two brothers who had taken different roads toward the same dream: to rise again, with honour intact.

Rahman's hard work soon bore fruit. After completing his Bachelor of Arts, he was offered a position as an accountant at St. John's College — one of Agra's most respected institutions. The college, with its red-brick arches and quiet courtyards shaded by neem trees, became his second home. Rahman took great pride in the neatness of his ledgers, the precision of his calculations, and the quiet respect he earned from British and Indian staff

alike. Dressed in a clean white kurta and neatly folded turban, he moved with calm dignity through the corridors, carrying himself with the same honour that once defined his father.

Every evening, when he returned to the modest home near the Taj, Gulzar would already be there — his hands blackened with polish, his laughter echoing through the courtyard. The brothers would sit together for supper, sharing news of their day. Rahman spoke of ledgers and professors, Gulzar of customers and tradesmen. Though their worlds were different, they drew strength from one another. Sometimes, as the call to prayer drifted across the Yamuna, Rahman would look toward the gleaming dome of the Taj Mahal and whisper to himself that this city, which had once been a refuge, had now become the ground where their family's honour began to rise again.

As the years passed, fortune began to favour the brothers. Rahman's steady salary from St. John's College and Gulzar's growing skill in the shoe trade slowly turned their modest savings into a small but proud sum. They lived simply — no luxuries, no waste — yet every coin saved carried the weight of their struggle from Peshawar. When Rahman finally counted enough to buy a small house in Qarwal Para, it felt less like a purchase and more like a victory.

The house stood on a quiet lane, shaded by a lone banyan tree, its walls lime-washed and its wooden door freshly painted. It was humble, but it was theirs — a symbol of endurance and dignity reclaimed. On the day they moved in, their uncle and aunt came to bless the home, bringing sweet halwa and garlands of marigold. Gulzar hung a small brass lantern by the entrance, vowing it would never go dark as long as they lived. That night, as Rahman sat in the courtyard beneath the soft glow of the lamp, he felt a deep stillness within — not pride, but peace. After years of wandering and humiliation, the sons of Haji Karim Khan had finally built a home again, not in the hills of Peshawar, but in the heart of Agra.

Gulzar's sharp wit and tireless energy soon lifted him above the other workers in the shoe shop. He had a natural way with people — he could charm the most difficult customer, strike a fair deal with suppliers, and still find time to share a joke with the apprentices. The shop's English owner, Mr. Burton, often remarked that Gulzar had "a head for business and a heart for loyalty," and within a few years, promoted him to manager. From dawn till dusk, Gulzar ran the place with a firm yet friendly hand, transforming the small workshop into one of the most trusted names in the bazaar.

His new position brought him not only better pay but also respect — the kind that cannot be bought. Dressed neatly in a waistcoat and crisp turban,

Gulzar carried himself with quiet confidence, though he never forgot where he had begun. In the evenings, after locking up the shop, he would walk home through the narrow lanes of Qarwal Para, the scent of leather still clinging to his hands. There, Rahman would often be waiting on the veranda, reading by the lamplight. They would share tea, laughter, and silence — two brothers who had started with nothing but pride and now stood as men of their own making.

By his early thirties, Gulzar's hard work and sharp business sense had made him one of the most respected tradesmen in Agra's bustling market circles. The day came when he finally had enough savings — and courage — to take the leap he had long dreamed of. With Rahman's blessing and a small loan from their uncle, Gulzar rented a modest corner shop in Saddar Bazaar, the heart of the British cantonment area. It was a bold move; few locals dared to open businesses there, where British officers and their families shopped for imported goods. But Gulzar had always believed that courage, not comfort, led to success.

He named the shop "Khyber Shoes," in quiet tribute to his homeland. The polished shelves gleamed with handcrafted boots and sandals, each pair made with care and pride. Before long, British officers' wives began frequenting the shop, praising the fine stitching and supple leather. Gulzar's reputation spread quickly — not just as a cobbler, but as a craftsman who understood both elegance and endurance. On weekends, Rahman would sometimes visit, watching his younger brother stand behind the counter with confidence and grace. What had begun years ago as a desperate struggle for survival had now become a story of triumph — two brothers from Peshawar who had carved a future for themselves in the very heart of British India.

When Rahman finally returned to Peshawar for the first time in years, it was not just a journey of memory but of purpose. Among the familiar dust-laden streets and the scent of apricots from old markets, he sought the one connection that had remained constant through all the upheaval — his cousin, Zainab. She had grown into a woman of quiet strength and gentle intelligence, her eyes reflecting the same pride and resilience that ran in their family. Rahman's heart, always disciplined and patient, found in her a partner who could share both the burdens of life and its small joys.

The marriage was simple yet full of warmth. Families gathered under the shade of tamarind trees, blessing the union with prayers and garlands of marigold. Rahman felt a rare peace as he held Zainab's hand, realizing that despite the years of hardship, the ties of family and honour had not weakened. Back in Agra, he shared the news with Gulzar, who laughed and clapped him on the back, proud not only of his brother's achievements but of the life he was now beginning to build. For Rahman, the marriage was

more than a bond of love — it was a bridge to the past he had lost and a foundation for the future he had fought so hard to secure.

While Rahman was building his life in Agra, the years carried their own quiet toll back in Peshawar. His younger sister, Amina, had come of age and married into a respectable family, leaving the old family home empty and silent. The joy of her wedding, though distant, reached Rahman through letters filled with the laughter and well-wishes of relatives he had not seen in years. Yet, joy was tempered with sorrow — news soon arrived that their parents had passed away, their deaths marking the final closing of a chapter that had begun with hope, only to be marred by loss.

Rahman read the letters in the stillness of his Agra home, the words heavy on his heart. There was grief, yes, but also a quiet sense of duty: their parents' lives, their sacrifices, and the honour they had instilled would now live on in the children they had raised. He visited his father and mother's graves in Peshawar whenever he could, standing under the blazing sun, whispering prayers for their souls. In those moments, he felt both the weight of the past and the determination to honour it — to live with integrity, build a home filled with respect and love, and ensure that their family's name, once tarnished by misfortune, now shone with the dignity they had reclaimed in Agra.

Gulzar's reputation as a skilled businessman and a man of integrity had begun to extend beyond the walls of his shop. Among those who took notice was Mr. Jamaluddin, a wealthy building contractor whose influence stretched across Agra. He had watched Gulzar for months — admiring the way the young Pathan managed his shop, treated customers with fairness, and carried himself with quiet pride. Impressed not only by Gulzar's work but also by the honour in his manner, Mr. Jamaluddin approached him with an offer that would elevate the family's standing even further: the hand of his daughter, Safia, in marriage.

Gulzar, ever proud but respectful, accepted after consulting Rahman and their uncle. The marriage was celebrated with grandeur in Saddar Bazaar, blending the vibrant streetscape with traditional Pathan customs. Safia, graceful and intelligent, immediately found a place in the household, earning the admiration of all who knew her. With her by his side, Gulzar's business thrived even more, and the shop became not just a place of commerce but a symbol of the family's hard-won success. The two brothers, each now with a family of their own, could finally look back at their journey from Peshawar with a sense of accomplishment, knowing that pride, perseverance, and honour had guided them every step of the way.

With time, the small house in Qarwal Para grew lively and full of warmth. Rahman and Gulzar, now both married, chose to continue living together as a joint family, honouring the Pathan tradition that valued unity, loyalty, and shared responsibility. The courtyard, once quiet and empty, now echoed

with the laughter of children — Rahman's sons and daughters chasing each other beneath the shade of the banyan tree, while Gulzar's children darted through the narrow lanes, their voices blending with the calls of the street vendors.

Life was far from easy, but the household thrived on cooperation and mutual respect. Rahman's disciplined nature ensured the home ran smoothly, while Gulzar's energetic spirit brought laughter and adventure to the daily routine. Family meals became a cherished ritual, with stories of Peshawar, their father, and their struggles passing from one generation to the next. In this single house, the brothers had rebuilt not just a home, but a legacy — a living testament to resilience, honour, and the enduring strength of family bonds. Through every challenge and joy, the walls of their home held a quiet, unshakable pride: the sons of Haji Karim Khan had risen, together, from exile and hardship to leave a mark of dignity for their children to inherit.

As the family grew, the small house in Qarwal Para began to feel crowded. The laughter of children, once a blessing, now spilled into every corner, and the narrow lanes offered little space for play or privacy. Seeing the need for a larger home, Rahman and Gulzar pooled their resources and purchased a spacious house in Savan Katra, a lively neighbourhood known for its tree-lined streets and bustling community life. The new home had wide courtyards, high ceilings, and enough rooms to give each family some space while still preserving the warmth of a joint household.

The move to Savan Katra marked a new chapter in the family's life. The children ran freely through the gardens, while Rahman and Gulzar took pride in the fruit trees and flowering shrubs they planted together. Neighbours, many of whom had known the brothers since their early days in Agra, came to congratulate them, marveling at the journey from humble beginnings in Saddar Bazaar to this spacious, welcoming home. Inside, the household thrived as before — a blend of discipline, laughter, and tradition — but now with room to grow, both in family and in the enduring legacy of the sons of Haji Karim Khan.

By the turn of the decade, the brothers' hard work and business acumen had transformed them from modest tradesmen into prominent entrepreneurs. Gulzar's shoe shop in Saddar Bazaar continued to flourish, and with Rahman's careful management of finances and family affairs, they amassed considerable wealth. Not content with modest success, they invested in a multi-storey building in Hing ki Mandi, the commercial heart of Agra, where traders and artisans from all over the region gathered. The building was impressive — brick and stone rising proudly over the busy streets — a visible testament to the brothers' perseverance and vision.

Inside, Gulzar installed the latest machines for producing shoes and laces, combining modern efficiency with the traditional craftsmanship that had won them their earliest customers. The factory hummed with activity from dawn to dusk, employing dozens of workers who respected both the quality of the products and the fairness of their employers. Rahman oversaw the accounts and business dealings, ensuring profits were reinvested wisely, while Gulzar maintained hands-on control over production. Together, they had created not just wealth, but a legacy of industry, innovation, and honour — a far cry from the days when they had walked from Peshawar with nothing but pride and determination.

When Gulzar purchased the triangular plot in Hing ki Mandi for their ambitious factory, whispers followed him through the crowded lanes. The plot was oddly shaped, a sharp triangle squeezed between two wider streets, and many of the old women in the neighbourhood shook their heads and muttered warnings. “A triangular plot brings misfortune,” they said, their voices heavy with superstition. “The spirits do not rest where three corners meet in such haste.” Gulzar, ever practical and unfazed by gossip, smiled politely but paid them no mind. “If work is honest and hands are steady, no shape can harm a man,” he replied, shrugging as he imagined the machines, the workers, and the bustling activity that would soon rise from the earth.

Despite the murmurs, the construction began. The triangular plot posed its challenges — angles that were awkward, walls that demanded creative engineering, and floors that required careful planning to make the most of the confined space. But Gulzar saw possibilities where others saw ill-omens. By the time the multi-storey factory stood complete, with polished floors and the latest machinery humming inside, the naysayers had little choice but to admire what had been achieved. What the old women had feared as a curse, the brothers had turned into a symbol of ingenuity and perseverance — a sharp-edged triangle that now stood proudly as the cornerstone of their expanding empire.

Gulzar’s vision for the triangular factory was not limited to commerce alone. Once the multi-storey building in Hing ki Mandi was complete, the brothers decided to use the top floor as their residence, blending work and home under one roof. The upper floor, with its high ceilings and large windows, offered sweeping views of the bustling streets below and the distant silhouette of the Taj Mahal, its white dome gleaming in the sunlight. The rooms were simple but comfortable — furnished with hand-carved wooden furniture, woven rugs, and spaces for family gatherings that welcomed both children and guests.

Living above the factory brought a new rhythm to their days. From dawn, the hum of machines and the chatter of workers became a constant backdrop, while the scent of leather and polish mingled with the warm

breezes that drifted through open windows. Rahman enjoyed overseeing the accounts from a quiet corner, while Gulzar often paced the floor above the factory, checking on production or planning expansions. Despite the industrious atmosphere, the residence was filled with laughter, meals shared in the courtyard, and the lively voices of children playing under the soft glow of lanterns at night. In that top-floor home, the brothers had crafted a life where family, work, and honour coexisted — a tangible crown atop the empire they had built from nothing.

The brothers' reputation for quality and craftsmanship soon reached far beyond Agra, attracting attention from unexpected quarters. One crisp morning, a letter arrived, embossed with the imperial seal of the Russian military procurement office. They had placed an order — hundreds of sturdy leather boots for soldiers stationed along the frontier. The request was unprecedented: a commission of such scale and prestige had rarely been entrusted to Indian artisans. Gulzar's eyes gleamed as he read the letter aloud to Rahman, who adjusted his spectacles and studied the figures carefully. It was a challenge — one that demanded precision, speed, and uncompromising quality — but it was also a mark of recognition that filled both brothers with pride.

The factory came alive with renewed energy. Gulzar reorganized production lines, trained workers to meet the exacting standards required by the Russian army, and tested every stitch and sole for durability. Rahman handled the accounts and logistics, negotiating shipping routes and ensuring that deadlines were met without compromising quality. For months, the hum of machines and the smell of fresh leather filled every corner of the building. When the first batch of boots was finally packed and sent off, the brothers allowed themselves a quiet moment of triumph. From humble beginnings in Peshawar to supplying an imperial army, their journey had not only restored their family's honour but also placed them on a stage far larger than they had ever imagined.

Time flowed steadily, carrying with it both the rhythms of work and the quiet passage of life. The brothers' children grew taller, stronger, and full of the same pride and determination that had shaped Rahman and Gulzar. Mornings were filled with the bustling energy of the factory and the laughter of young ones chasing each other through the top-floor residence, while evenings brought quiet lessons, stories of Peshawar, and the smells of home-cooked meals drifting through the corridors.

As years passed, the eldest sons and daughters of both families came of age. One by one, they were married, bringing new daughters-in-law and sons-in-law into the household, each adding their own voices, laughter, and traditions. The joint home in Savan Katra, and later the top floor of the factory in Hing ki Mandi, became a lively centre of family life — a place where multiple generations lived, worked, and celebrated together.

Through these years, the brothers watched with pride as their children carved their own paths, carrying forward the values of honesty, perseverance, and honour that had guided Rahman and Gulzar from the streets of Peshawar to the bustling heart of Agra.

All seemed settled, the family flourishing in Agra, their business thriving, and their children married and beginning families of their own. For decades, the brothers had known a life of stability, where honour and hard work were the currency of success, and the memories of Peshawar felt like distant shadows softened by time. The factory hummed steadily, the courtyard echoed with children's laughter, and the evenings were filled with warmth, storytelling, and quiet satisfaction. Life had settled into a rhythm both predictable and comforting.

But the world beyond their walls was changing. Years of political unrest, protests, and rising nationalist movements had reached a climax. The British, who had ruled for centuries, finally decided to withdraw and partitioned the country into two — India and Pakistan. News of the division spread like wildfire, bringing with it fear, uncertainty, and upheaval. Agra, once a city of stability for the brothers, was no longer untouched by turmoil. Though they had built wealth, reputation, and a thriving family, the shadow of displacement loomed once more. The same resilience that had carried Rahman and Gulzar from Peshawar to Agra now faced a test of a different kind — one where borders, politics, and history itself threatened to reshape everything they had built.

The partition struck the family like a storm that no one had seen coming. In the beginning, they tried to believe that their lives in Agra — their home, their business, their friendships — would remain untouched. But as the borders hardened and trains began carrying families in both directions, conversations at the dinner table turned heavy with uncertainty. It was Gulzar who first faced the impossible choice. His younger children, stirred by a sense of belonging to the new homeland of Pakistan, decided to leave Agra and begin anew across the border. Only his eldest son, Rashid, chose to remain behind to manage the family factory with his uncle Rahman.

The day of departure was one of the hardest the family had ever known. The courtyard of the Hing ki Mandi residence, once filled with laughter, echoed instead with the quiet sobs of parting. Gulzar stood motionless as his children boarded the train, his heart torn between pride and sorrow. "Wherever you go," he told them softly, "remember who you are — sons and daughters of Karim Khan, whose honour no border can divide." Rahman placed a hand on his brother's shoulder, his own children standing beside him, resolute in their decision to stay in India.

When the train finally disappeared into the distance, carrying half the family toward an uncertain future, an aching silence settled over the house. The brothers had once journeyed together from Peshawar to Agra in search of life and dignity — now, history had reversed their path, sending one branch of the family back across the border, and leaving the other to guard the legacy they had built.

At first, nothing much seemed to change. The Partition had redrawn maps and divided nations, but within the solid walls of the Hing ki Mandi building, life continued much as it always had. The machines still hummed, the workers still arrived at dawn, and the brothers still shared their evening tea on the terrace overlooking the restless city. Gulzar and his eldest son, Rashid, refused to go to Pakistan, despite the repeated letters from his other children urging him to join them. “This factory is our home,” Gulzar would say, his voice firm but weary. “I built it with my own hands. My blood is in these walls. How can I abandon it now?”

Rahman, ever the pragmatist, watched his brother with quiet concern. The political winds were shifting, property laws were changing, and tensions simmered just beneath the surface. One evening, after the muezzin’s call had faded and the city’s noise softened, Rahman broached the matter gently. “Gulzar,” he said, “times are uncertain. You have children across the border who need you. Hand over the business and the building to me — I will manage everything here. You can go to Pakistan with Rashid and live peacefully with your family.”

But Gulzar’s eyes hardened. “No, Rahman,” he replied quietly but firmly. “I left Peshawar once — I will not leave again. This soil has known my labour and my sweat. My children in Pakistan have their lives, but mine is here.” The two brothers sat in silence for a long while, the hum of the machines below filling the space between them. It was the first time a shadow of division crept into their bond — not born of anger, but of unspoken fear, pride, and the pain of a world that had changed around them.

The bond that had once been the brothers’ greatest strength slowly began to fray. What had started as quiet disagreements over the business turned into bitter arguments whispered through closed doors and carried by uneasy servants. The factory, once a symbol of unity and pride, now seemed to echo with distrust. Rahman, ever calculating and cautious, began to convince himself that his years of managing the finances and expanding the enterprise entitled him to greater claim. Gulzar, proud and unyielding, saw such reasoning as betrayal. “We built this together,” he would say, his voice trembling with anger. “The sweat of my hands is in every brick — how dare you speak of ownership?”

In time, Rahman took a step from which there was no return. He filed a legal case, claiming that the factory, the land, and the building all belonged to him — that Gulzar's role had been no more than that of a partner without legal standing. The papers were served one morning while Gulzar was overseeing production, the official's knock cutting through the steady hum of machinery. Workers paused, uneasy, sensing that something sacred had broken. Gulzar read the document in silence, his face pale, his hands trembling slightly as the weight of betrayal settled over him. The two brothers who had once crossed deserts together, who had shared hunger, laughter, and triumph, now faced each other as adversaries in a courtroom — their father's legacy caught between pride and bitterness, and their family divided by the same forces of greed and grief that had once driven them from Peshawar.

The case that began as a bitter quarrel soon grew into a consuming storm that swallowed everything the brothers had built. What was meant to be settled in months dragged on for ten long years — a decade of petitions, hearings, and appeals that drained not only their fortune but also their spirit. The lawyers, ever patient and polite, fed upon the family's pride, their endless fees slowly devouring the wealth that once sustained an empire of leather and industry. Court orders froze accounts, records vanished, and the factory's proud hum fell silent.

At first, Rahman and Gulzar both believed justice would eventually vindicate them. But as the years passed, hope gave way to exhaustion. To pay legal costs, they sold machine after machine, until the once-bustling factory stood hollow — its great iron presses dismantled, its leather stock auctioned off, and the echo of footsteps replaced by the creak of emptiness. Workers who had once called the brothers malik now drifted away to other shops, whispering of the curse of the triangular plot.

By the end of the decade, the grand building in Hing ki Mandi — once a monument to their unity and ambition — stood stripped and weary, its walls stained with dust and memory. The brothers, now old and grey, passed one another in the courtroom corridors without words, their eyes reflecting the ruin of what had once been a shared dream. All that remained of their fortune was the silence between them — heavier than wealth, sharper than loss.

At last, after ten weary years of hearings and adjournments, the court gave its verdict. The judge, an aging man with tired eyes and a stern voice, declared that the property and the factory rightfully belonged to Gulzar. The decision came quietly on a humid afternoon, without drama or fanfare — just a few words spoken over yellowing files and trembling hands. Gulzar sat still as the judgment was read, his expression unreadable. Rahman, standing across the courtroom, felt the world tilt beneath him. What should

have brought closure only deepened the ache of years lost to pride and bitterness.

When Gulzar stepped out into the sunlight, the victory felt hollow. There was no wealth left to claim, no factory to run, no pride to rebuild. The machines were gone, the workers dispersed, and the building stood like an empty shell — his in name, but lifeless in every other sense. He had won the case but lost the brother who had once walked beside him through hunger, exile, and ambition. As he gazed up at the crumbling walls of the triangular factory, Gulzar whispered to himself, “It was never the land that mattered… it was us.” But it was too late. The law had spoken, and the years had already taken what no judgment could return.

Defeated and humiliated, Rahman gathered what little remained of his life. The court’s verdict had stripped him not only of property but of pride — the pride that had once sustained him through hardship and exile. Friends who had once dined with him now avoided his gaze, and even the shopkeepers in the bazaar spoke in hushed tones when his name was mentioned. His home was sold to pay the last of the legal debts, and the only path left was the one that led across the new border — to Pakistan, where some of his relatives still lived.

One pale morning, as the first call to prayer echoed through the narrow lanes, Rahman loaded a small cart with a few trunks, his wife and children silent beside him. There were no farewells between the brothers. Gulzar stood by the window of the empty factory’s upper floor, watching the cart disappear into the distance. He could not bring himself to speak or wave — pride and regret bound him in equal measure. As Rahman crossed into Pakistan, he looked back one last time at the fading outline of the city that had once held his dreams. Behind him lay ten years of bitterness; ahead, only uncertainty. Yet in his heart, he carried a silent prayer — that one day, their children might find the peace and unity that he and his brother had lost.

Time, relentless and unforgiving, brought new trials even to Gulzar. Years after the bitter court battle, he suffered a stroke that left him paralysed, confined to a chair in the quiet rooms of the old factory. The robust energy that had once driven the business, the laughter that had echoed through the top-floor residence, all faded into a slow, measured rhythm of silence and care. His children, scattered across Pakistan and Agra, came and went, but the weight of the factory and its legacy fell squarely on the shoulders of Rashid, his eldest son.

With determination and humility, Rashid took charge. The grand ambitions of his father were scaled down, and the factory reopened modestly, employing just a handful of workers to produce shoes and laces for the local

market. The triangular building no longer hummed with the ceaseless clatter of machines for imperial orders; instead, it carried the quieter, steadier pulse of survival. Rashid managed with care, keeping his father's name and honour intact while avoiding the mistakes that had once torn the family apart. Though the empire they had built was reduced, the essence of their legacy endured — a testament to resilience, pride, and the enduring spirit of the sons of Haji Karim Khan.

Across the border, in the bustling port city of Karachi, Rahman's eldest son set out to rebuild the family's fortunes from scratch. Inspired by the stories of his father and uncle, he opened a small shoe factory, modest in size but ambitious in vision. The streets of Karachi, alive with traders, migrants, and the hum of a city in transformation, provided fertile ground for enterprise. With careful management, attention to quality, and a determination to honor the family name, the young entrepreneur gradually expanded production, hiring skilled workers and introducing modern machinery when he could afford it.

Within a few years, the factory grew into one of the city's respected establishments. Shoes bearing the family's mark found their way into markets across Sindh, and the reputation for durability and craftsmanship spread steadily. Rahman's son maintained the discipline and integrity instilled by his father, earning not just wealth but respect among both customers and competitors. While the brothers' paths had diverged decades earlier, the legacy of Haji Karim Khan lived on in both Agra and Karachi — in Gulzar's modest factory managed by Rashid, and in the thriving enterprise of Rahman's son, a reminder that perseverance, pride, and family honour could survive even the harshest trials of history.

In the quiet twilight of his life, Gulzar sat in his chair by the window of the now-humble factory, the city's distant hum drifting through the open shutters. His hands, once steady and strong, rested motionless on his lap. Memories came unbidden — of long walks with Rahman through Peshawar, of the bustling streets of Agra, of the pride and ambition that had carried him and his brother through decades of toil. And then, like a shadow at the edge of his mind, he remembered the old women who had whispered warnings when he first purchased the triangular plot in Hing ki Mandi.

Their words had seemed superstition at the time — idle talk to be ignored. Now, in the stillness, Gulzar understood their weight. The plot had not just shaped a building; it had become a symbol of fortune and loss, of triumph and ruin, of pride that had turned brother against brother. Yet even in that bitter reckoning, he felt no anger, only the quiet sorrow of a man who had seen the heights of success and the depths of estrangement. Outside, the city carried on, indifferent to the lives and legacies of those within its streets. Inside, Gulzar closed his eyes, and for the first time in years, he let the stillness settle over him. The machines no longer hummed, the factory

stood modestly alive under Rashid’s care, and the echoes of the past whispered gently through the triangular walls. It was too late for regrets, too late for reconciliation — yet the story of their lives, of ambition, pride, and endurance, lingered quietly in the corners of the building.

The End.